

Anti-Inflation Policies

Mr. Drury: How did I get into it?

If the government, even at this late date, really believes that regional economic disparity is the number one problem facing the nation, which I believe to be a fact, then let it look at projects such as the Prince Edward Island causeway. They spent millions to have a candidate turn over a sod the day before the election, and I think the Auditor General had something to say about that. However, the government intends to fix him in some way, to put him out of a job.

An hon. Member: One more unemployed.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): There is the Prince Edward Island causeway or the harnessing of the Bay of Fundy tides to provide power, the type of project which would immediately employ the labour force of the Atlantic region.

We live in an age when statistics are passed out by government agencies, defended when confronted by other statistics, checked by a computer lest a mistake has been made and our slip is showing. Then, they are filed and forgotten. Not only the statistics are filed and forgotten, but also the stories of human tragedy which lie behind those cold and seemingly meaningless statistics.

We talk of 6 per cent unemployment; we talk of 6.5 or 6.7 and we can quote statistics of up to 20 or 25 per cent. But does anyone on the government side stop to think and say: Twenty per cent unemployed? Why, that means one in every five is out of work. One in every five is walking the streets. One in five is facing problems the like of which few of us can comprehend during these days of affluence and plenty. It is the tragedy of Canada in 1970—in the so-called “Just Society”. What is the government’s attitude to this tragedy? It can be summed up, I think, in the remarks of a man who said, some years ago:

I have known people to stop and buy an apple on the corner and then walk away as if they had solved the whole unemployment problem.

Maybe the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene), though still youthful in appearance, can remember those days when people tried to earn a living by selling apples on street corners. Few of us can comprehend the thinking which has led to unemployment on its present scale in the era of the just society—

An hon. Member: The age of Aquarius.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Yes, the age of Aquarius. And the age of the rule of the millionaires in the cabinet of Canada.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): The government does not give a damn about creating unemployment. Indeed, it is using unemployment as its chief weapon in the fight against inflation. We raise our hands in horror when we hear of troops herding innocent villagers before them to take the bullets of the enemy. This country should raise its hands in horror that the government of the day is herding innocent citizens before it to take the brunt of inflation. It is true these people will not die physically. But for many life will not longer have meaning. Their agonies will be the cries of their children who must be deprived of some of the very basic necessities of life when they are surrounded by plenty. Is this how the government has to fight inflation? No kidding, Mr. Speaker, there must be other ways.

The Prime Minister of Canada has said he can live with 6 per cent unemployment, and he will not worry. How much different is this statement by the Prime Minister from the voice of yesteryear, that old cliché that still applies, “Let them eat cake”? Do the Prime Minister and his colleagues, his “millionaires row”, really know what it is like to walk the streets despairingly looking for work, knowing that all doors are closed; that you are possibly too old at 40; that “sloppy Joes” and spaghetti will be the nearest you will get to a sumptuous feast; that your kids will have to go without shoes even if the ones they have are pinching or full of holes; that those same kids will be denied the opportunity of improving their station in life because incentive dies in poverty? Do they really know these things?

• (4:50 p.m.)

Perhaps I am doing him an injustice. We know that the Prime Minister is prepared to sleep with a high rate of unemployment. We also know that unemployment is a painful side effect in the fight against inflation. The Prices and Incomes Commission has issued a pamphlet on this very issue. As the House knows, this Commission is headed up by the man who has received a tan from the television camera lights that are always shining on him; I am referring to Mr. Young.

Mr. Bell: He is like the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): Yes, and he is just about as active as far as talking and doing nothing are concerned.